

**SENIOR CENTER/COA**  
Fiscal Year 2004

**SENIOR CENTER**

**Staffing Changes/Reductions**

This has been an extraordinarily difficult year for our Senior Center for a variety of reasons. Three long-time staff had major health problems, we had several retirements, and there have been budget cuts. All of this has resulted in major staffing reductions. At the beginning of FY 04 we had nine workers: an Executive Director, a Program Director, two Social Workers (one worked three days a week and one worked five days a week but had other non-Senior Center responsibilities), one eight-hour-a-week grant-funded Nurse, one Secretary who worked full-time (in spite of a 50% budget cut to her position), one Administrative Assistant working 30 hours a week (but with major Town-wide scheduling responsibilities in addition to her Senior Center work), one lunch site manager and one half-time Green Thumb worker.

Three people took early retirement in December, our Green Thumb worker moved out of state, and our Executive Director retired in April. We have hired one full-time Administrative Assistant, who started in February. Presently, the Program Director is also serving as Interim Director, we have a four-day-a-week Social Worker, a part-time meal site manager, our eight-hour-a-week Nurse and an Administrative Assistant. We have five people doing the work formerly done by nine, and only one of us is 100% funded by the Town to be working entirely on Senior Center responsibilities. The Town Manager is about to hire a consultant to look at our community center (which houses all the Town human service departments) to see if a reorganization of some sort is a good idea or not. This process will be completed by the end of next June; so we are in a holding pattern until then. To get through the vacations and rough spots, the Town Manager has allowed us to set up an Extra Help line item, with some of our unused personnel money, to hire temporary part-time assistance on an “as-needed” basis.

**Office Organization Work**

A tremendous amount of our time has been, and continues to be, expended on creating and revising systems for grant writing and reporting, collecting statistics, training our nine-member COA (four out of nine started on July 1), creating a working filing system, and working towards finding legitimate dedicated funding for the current staff. Training manuals and information that all our COA members had been working with was at least a decade old and very limited.

**Volunteer Notes of Interest**

Our Senior Center continues to be a major training site for area college students. We had 45 working with us this year doing things such as home meal deliveries, working in our congregate lunch program, friendly visiting, helping with errands and grocery shopping, recreation program assistance, reading to visually impaired persons, telephone reception, setting up bookkeeping systems and entering data (two boys received the Chancellor’s Award for this), as well as general administrative work.

Amherst continues to be an outstanding caring community and our staff just couldn't manage to run such an active program without its community volunteers – this year we have 128 (45 students plus 83 others)!

### **Transportation Challenges**

Beginning in July 2003, our local transit authority increased its charges to Pioneer Valley users of its van and bus systems because of budget cuts. Prior to this, Amherst seniors and disabled persons had been riding at no charge because UMass student fees made the 5-College bus system free for all. After July 1, 2003, the “dial-a-ride” door-to-door van service available to elderly and disabled (a companion equal-access program linked to the local bus routes) began charging \$2 for each one-way ride. Area buses also began charging non-students.

To mitigate the devastating impact of this sudden new expense for Amherst van riders, Town Meeting appropriated \$15,000 to buy books of 20 tickets @ \$30 each and then resold them to van riders at \$20 each. They are sold through our Senior Center and also at Town Hall. Additional subsidies can be made available to augment that because of a \$3,000 grant from a local bank and a compassionate Town policy of discretion applied by our staff case by case. The impact of van ticket sales on our staff has been tremendous. In FY 04 \$23,919.20 was collected from ticket sales. A great deal of staff time daily is taken up with this. We anticipate further cuts, and even a rumored elimination of the door-to-door service in FY 06.

### **New 20-Passenger Van**

The Amherst Senior Center/COA was awarded a grant from EOTC this year which paid for 80% of a new 20-passenger lift-equipped van. Our Senior Trust (a 501-C3), together with the help of the Town, raised the 20% basic van purchase local share and also \$10,845 for amenities, such as high back seats and foot rests. We are in the process of fundraising to cover van overhead. We have received almost \$5,000 in donations for personnel and other vehicle expenses so far, but we are finding that start-up costs will use up about \$2,000 of that. There is no money budgeted by the Town for this new van program; so progress in getting it on the road on a regular basis is slow.

Since receiving the van this spring, we have been able to reinstate some of our trips for which not enough people had signed up to justify the trip in a motorcoach. (This has been a big problem for our Senior Travel Club since 9-11.) Our goal is to provide lots of interesting low-cost and occasionally free group trips. We want to bring elders to participate in the Governor's Walking Program, attend workshops at the local hospital like “Better Breathers,” and take out our visually impaired and other area special needs groups to places and events of interest.

### **Food Programs Expanding**

The Senior Center's ability to assist folks struggling to make ends meet grew substantially this year in the area of food. In calculating our FY 04 annual report for the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, we estimate that all our free meal programs combined delivered \$122,650 worth of food to the needy. This assistance to strained budgets hit hard by increases in the cost of transportation, medicine and housing, has made a huge difference in people's lives.

Last November, in a joint effort with us, the Amherst Survival Center expanded their monthly food box program to include four distribution sites for elders, including Ann Whalen Apartments Clark House, Chestnut Court Apartments and the Bangs Community Center. A total of 298 boxes of food were delivered to low income-qualified applicants, who each place personal orders in advance for what they need. Items include canned vegetables and fruits, cereals, pasta and rice, frozen meat, personal needs items, sauces, soups, beans and dessert mixes.

The participation of merchants in our Wednesday program of free bread and baked goods expanded from Big Y and Henion Bakery to include Trader Joe's. What is exciting is that periodically Trader Joe's sends produce along with the bread and baked goods. The result is that the number of elders participating in the program has increased by about 50%.

Our Senior Center home-delivered meals programs sent out 16,685 meals to 102 elders on six delivery routes Mondays through Fridays. We know that this support has made it possible for many, many elders to remain in their homes, in spite of failing health, as it is not only providing nourishment but a daily well-being check. Our congregate lunch program served 5,933 meals and also continues to expand, thanks to our exceptional nutrition-site coordinator, although we too are following the national trend of greatest growth in home deliveries.

### **Congregate Housing Program Winding Down**

Another change this past fiscal year was the decision to not reapply for grant money for the Congregate Housing Program at the Jean Elder House in Amherst and the Joan Tobin Congregate Apartments in Florence. The census at both sites continued to be very low and there have not been any new applications, or interest, during the past two fiscal years. Three of the six apartments at the Jean Elder House and one of the two at Joan Tobin have been leased to private, not-for-profit human service agencies as supervised apartments for people with developmental disabilities or head injuries. The residents at both sites are very independent, with only one of the six receiving services. Furthermore, the Amherst Housing Authority decided not to consider the Jean Elder House congregate housing, and when the Senior Center's Social Worker/Congregate Coordinator became the only social worker at the end of December, there was not any time to visit either site. Consequently, after many discussions, we decided that ethically we could not reapply for the money.

### **Nursing Center**

Established in 1998, the Nursing Center at the Amherst Senior Center continues to grow. It provides no-fee healthcare services for older adults with a mission of "helping seniors help themselves stay healthy." Monies from donations support the services rendered. The Nursing Center delivers quality preventative healthcare services that are usually not covered by Medicare or other insurers. Each individual is viewed as an active participant in the healthcare process, and the focus is on the individual's potential. The Nursing Center is open eight hours per week and is staffed by a nationally certified Advanced Practice Nurse. In this role, the APN neither determines medical diagnoses nor does he/she prescribe medications.

**Respectfully submitted by Nancy Hirsh Pagano, Interim Director**

## AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING

The FY 04 year began with a new organizational structure – a steering committee, or, as we decided to call it, a Leadership Team. This was an idea suggested by the nominating committee when no one was willing to take the position of chair or secretary of the Council on Aging. The Leadership Team was made up of three Council members: Jean Haggerty, Henry Peirce and Sara Wolff, and three staff members: Barbara Slovin, who was succeeded by Maura Plante; Nancy Pagano, and John Clobridge. This team held a regular agenda planning meeting each month, two weeks before the scheduled Council meeting. This worked well in several ways: Having time for staff and Council members to discuss problems resulted in Council members being better informed; it made for better organized meetings; and it made for a good working relationship between staff members and Council on Aging members. As the year progressed, we got feedback that this structure, as well as having co-leaders, Jean Haggerty and Sara Wolff take turns chairing meetings, made for a positive atmosphere which encouraged participation and exchange of ideas, and resulted in a smoother functioning and more effective Council.

It is also significant that we had a retreat on November 6, 2003. David Stevens, of the Massachusetts Council on Aging, and a colleague of John Clobridge, was facilitator. Agenda items were suggested by both staff and Council members. Council members wanted to know more about the nuts and bolts of how the Senior Center was funded and operated, with particular concern about staffing shortages and the role of the Director. The Town Manager attended and spoke about the fiscal crisis and how it might affect the Senior Center. His presence was important and affirming, as he clearly listened and participated. Priorities and goals for the year was the agenda item which received least attention, but the retreat ended with requests for future retreats and with the promise that the co-leaders would follow up with the Town Manager to advocate on behalf of the staff, who were feeling overwhelmed. In the following months, the co-leaders felt the Town Manager was responsive when they expressed their concerns about the Senior Center.

The history of the Senior Trust was discussed at several meetings, and questions were raised about its current role in view of the budget crisis. Distinguishing between what the Town should be responsible for and what the Trust should pay for will be the subject of on-going discussion.

Even though there was no formal discussion at the Retreat about goals and priorities, it quickly became apparent that transportation and fundraising were priorities. The COA made a statement at PVTA public hearings and sent letters to the chair of the Transportation Committee and to the Governor. We were fortunate to have Al Byam as a member of the Council to keep us informed and up-to-date. He also suggested having an adjunct fundraising group and informally chaired a brainstorming session on how this might work.

It was a year of activism, much of it done by Jean Haggerty, who represented the Council at Town Meeting on many occasions. She also served as the link between the Council and the Massachusetts Senior Action Council and Stavros, traveling to Worcester and to Boston to represent elder causes, such as funding for PCAs (Personal Care Attendants), repeal of Medicare bills, housing and transportation. She spoke about transportation needs and the elderly at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Eldercare Conference sponsored by the Massachusetts Public Health Association, the Department of Public Health, the Western Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging, and the Western Region Aging Service, held at the Mount Marie Conference Center on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004. She and Sara Wolff attended sessions on Elder Affairs and on Transportation at Stan

Rosenberg's 2004 Municipal Conference. Sara Wolff continued meeting with the committee that had been advisory to the Nursing Center, hoping to find ways of expanding health services to the elderly. She and Jean Haggerty will follow up on the idea of having the Ann Whalen House become a faculty practice site for the UMass School of Nursing. Liz Massey and Elsie Fetterman represented our Council at meetings of Highland Valley Elder Services. Hank Peirce, Frank Lattuca and Janice Denton worked tirelessly on formulating a letter to the business and professional communities requesting funds for upkeep for our new van. They sent out approximately seven hundred letters, and then sent thank-you letters to all who responded. Hank has stayed actively involved with TRIAD, making sure that street names and addresses are visible in emergency calls. Janice has spent many volunteer hours at the Senior Center answering phones at the hostess desk and helping out with special events and calls for the Senior Travel Club. The Council was involved in many celebrations. There was great excitement when the much anticipated new van arrived. The celebration included State Representative Ellen Story and State Senator Stan Rosenberg, who were instrumental in our getting the van. Ferne Finger and Nancy Pagano were praised for their persistence in pursuing the van, grant writing, and nailing down all of the details. The van was also the focus of a "VanGo" raffle and a fundraising letter. There were two retirement parties, with the most elaborate one, a dinner at the Bangs Community Center for family and friends of Barbara Slovin, Barbara Taylor, and Maureen Vanhoutte. This was a real community effort with all preparation, food, decorations, clean-up done by our own chef and work crew. Our local officials also participated in this celebration.

There was very much the feeling of the end of an era with the retirement of people who had been an important part of the Senior Center for so long. This was heightened when shortly after the first retirement party, John Clobridge, who had been Director of the Council on Aging for 23 years, announced that he also had decided to leave. The second party, a reception attended by many members of the community, celebrated the contributions he had made over the years.

For the coming year it is clear that we must be more visible in the community: by having representatives at Town Meeting, by having our Select Board liaison, Gerry Weiss, become involved, by establishing a "Friends of the Senior Center" group to do public relations and fundraising, by doing outreach, and by having articles in the newspaper. We must be more knowledgeable about how our Area Agency on Aging, Highland Valley Elder Services, Inc. can assist us both in terms of services and grants. Finally, we must continue advocacy for adequate Public Transportation and for Town funding for a full-time Social Worker, a Program Director, an Administrative Assistant, and a Director of the Senior Center.

Respectfully submitted, Sara Wolff and Jean Haggerty, Co-Chairs